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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on a study of 169 institutions and 397 faculty, reports the findings of a national survey of institutions offering credit instruction in gerontology. The survey sought to identify the most pertinent administrative and procedural characteristics of gerontology education programs and, in addition, sought to describe the training, background, and accomplishments of the faculty associated with these programs. The data derived from this study has been archived within the University of Nebraska Computer Network for access by researchers and program developers interested in studying the data files in detail. (Author)

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GERONTOLOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE STATE OF THE FIELD[1]*

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Although gerontology in higher education is usually considered a phenomenon of the past twenty years, there is evidence suggesting that grant funded research and instruction in the field of aging have existed for nearly fifty years. Gerontology research appeared as early as 1928 when a $10,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation was awarded to Stanford University for the establishment of a research unit to study the psychology of aging (Birren, 1961).

Education in the field was initiated in the early 1940s when a graduate studies program in human development at the University of Chicago offered instruction on the developmental aspects of aging. With that as a start, aging studies began to spring up in many post-secondary institutions. In 1957, a grant awarded to the Inter-University Training Institute in Social Gerontology at the University of Michigan made it possible to survey university instruction. The Institute found that fifty of the 312 institutions polled offered courses in social gerontology (Kleemeier, 1957).

The availability of research and training support greatly increased in the 1960s. The National Institute of Child and Human Development began to award research training grants through its Adult Development and Aging Branch in 1963 and by 1969, had funded

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twenty-six such programs (Gerontologist, 1970). In 1967, under Title V of the Older Americans Act, the Administration on Aging granted training monies to seventeen colleges and universities. Their programs ranged from the Ph.D. level to special certificate programs and included the categories of: planning and administration, community organization, professional personnel in recreation, social work, multi-service centers, programming, and adult education.

By 1976, various titles of the Older Americans Act provided a total of $24.3 million for a wide variety of projects. Under Title IV-A, $14 million was awarded for training, conferences and student stipends, including $7 million for sixty-five career training grants, sixteen planning grants and fourteen developmental and quality improvement grants. Title IV-B supplied $6.3 million for eighty-four research and development projects. Thirteen developmental grants and seven operational grants, totaling $4 million, supported Multidisciplinary Centers of Gerontology, under Title IV-C (Aging, 1975-1976).

A study conducted by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (Sprouse, 1976) found approximately 1,270 institutions of higher education conducting aging related activities, including community service for the elderly and both credit and non-credit education/training programs. One hundred thirty junior-community colleges, from a study sample of 428, indicated that they offered credit instruction in gerontology. This compares with 199 out of 373 four-year colleges, and 278 of 345 universities in the study.

As recently as 1971, there were calls to higher education and the federal government for an increase in the training and education "manifold" (Birren & Gribbin, 1971). The sentiment expressed by

Birren and Gribbin is reflected by many who anticipate continued rapid growth in the field (Lowy & Miller, 1974; Lawton, 1971; Woodruff & Birren, 1974).

This paper will attempt to clarify the current state of the field to the extent possible with the considerable ebb and flow of emerging, growing, changing and, in some cases, expiring gerontology programs in universities, colleges, and junior-community colleges across the nation.

RELATED LITERATURE

Numerous precedents have been established in the study of higher education programs which provide frameworks for collecting pertinent descriptive program data. Burton Clark's (1960) in-depth analysis of an open door community college was an early assessment of this evolving institutional form. Clark discussed the historical growth and development of the junior-community college, its students, its administrative organization, and the instructional programs responding to the educational needs associated with its role. In a descriptive investigation into higher education (as a field of study), Dressel and Mayhew (1975) explored the elements of departmental and program structure as well as curriculum design and the intended educational outcomes for students completing programs in this newly developed field.

The accountability movement of the late 1960s reflected a continuing concern among financial supporters of higher education for increased cost effectiveness in the production of college trained manpower. This pressure to produce hard data led to an exploration of possible accounting assessments of the outputs and impacts of higher education. Among the principal investigating groups in this

probe was the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE, 1970). One direct result of such work is the realization that many subjective goals of higher education are practically impossible to quantify. However, a great deal of progress has been made in defining the data needed to understand higher education in its present "steady state" context.

To avoid becoming overenamored with the potential of applying sophisticated accounting models to the evaluation of higher education, we must consider the warning given by Pace (1971). In reviewing the advent of institutional accounting, he suggested that although comprehensive data on the productivity of higher education programs is greatly beneficial, the analogous modes drawn from other fields could victimize higher education. He contended that models based upon the factory conception of processing raw materials, or the business idea of distributing goods "at so much per unit cost" cannot be extrapolated into the evaluation of higher education.

These constraints, then, are placed upon the type of information which is considered useful for developing meaningful, lasting measures of the factors involved in operating programs of study in higher education. The model chosen in this study is based on the belief that quantities and tabulations of basic data are essential to an understanding of the current state of gerontology education. Without a basic "system" of data, more sophisticated forms of evaluation and critique will not be possible or, at best, will be woefully incomplete.

METHODOLOGY

The project from which our data is derived was a study conducted by the Gerontology Program of the University of Nebraska

at Omaha through a grant from the U.S. Administration on Aging. The goal of the project was to improve the quality of information available on gerontology education in post-secondary educational institutions by developing and implementing a baseline data collection and categorization "system." The results should provide the profession with an accessible data base to answer many of the questions persisting within the field today.

The project objectives were:

1. To design a data collection procedure to provide clearly defined categories and sub-categories of information encompassing current activities in the field;

2. To collect data from post-secondary educational institutions offering: (a) credit courses in gerontology, and/or (b) a general program of studies which culminates in a credential in aging related practices; and

3. To provide a data base and retrieval system which may be employed as a basic archive on gerontology education in the United States.

Three sources of information were utilized in producing the descriptive indexes contained in this article. The National Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology: First Edition (Sprouse, 1976) served as the primary source for identifying institutions to be included in the project and for providing the general institutional characteristics of the sample. Approximately 600 of the institutions in The Directory indicated that they offered at least one credit course in gerontology or aging related topics. Four hundred institutions reported that they offered two or more credit courses related to aging. The latter group was selected as the primary sample

of institutions for our Gerontology Education Data Project.

This study, our second source, collected data from 169 institutions that returned mailed questionnaires -- a response rate of 42 percent. Three hundred ninety-seven faculty members from these institutions also completed a separate faculty questionnaire. The survey found that many programs described in The Directory had changed considerably since it was published. In several instances, since the contact person had left or had been reassigned, aging studies were eliminated at that institution. In some cases, programs were terminated because funding was not renewed. The programs which emerged after The Directory was published were not included in the data project sample. The third source of data was interview visits to seventeen institutions selected from The Directory or known by project staff to have well established gerontology education organizations. The institutions were classified in the following six types:

National Private Universities -- institutions which endeavor to achieve nationally representative student populations and whose faculty are recognized nationally;

Private Universities -- institutions which are not publicly supported but which represent special groups or a limited geographical region;

Public "Multiversities" -- programmatically comprehensive, publicly supported institutions which are recognized as representative institutions for given states;

Regional State Universities -- institutions which receive public support and serve a limited geographical region;

Undergraduate Colleges -- primarily four-year institutions either

publicly supported in a state system or private liberal arts institutions with religious affiliations; and

Junior-Community Colleges -- publicly supported two-year institutions.

During the campus visits, persons participating in gerontology education, curriculum and administration were interviewed on the historical development of the program or curriculum, current faculty activities, and future expectations for gerontology education at that institution. The information collected through this phase of the project has been recorded in separate case studies.

The data base for gerontology education includes three computer files of data on institutions with gerontology curricula, faculty associated with these programs, and selected information regarding the 1,270 institutions from The Directory. The information reported here represents only a portion of the total data base and does not reflect any attempt to compare associated variables or develop contrasts among differing institutional types or program categories. This paper will simply offer percentages and, where appropriate, means.

BASIC INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Gerontology Education Data Project questionnaire sought information regarding the size and programmatic characteristics of the institutions offering gerontology curricula. The following four descriptive indexes help describe the population of institutions supporting gerontology education in some fashion.

A. Institutional Size. Institutions surveyed included universities, colleges containing graduate programs, undergraduate colleges and junior-community colleges. The institutions responding to the

survey include the aforementioned types from all geographical regions of the nation. Institutional size, as calculated by student enrollments, ranged from fifty-six to 52,000 students. With an unadjusted N of 169, the mean institutional size was 9,100.

B. Institutional Type. All institutions reported their primary source of financial support and control. Ten institutions opted for the "other" category and were omitted from the percentage computation. Of the remaining 159 respondents, 107 or 67.3 percent specified public support, while 52 or 32.7 percent indicated private support and control.

C. Credentials Offered. Each respondent was requested to name the types of credentials awarded by his institution. The following seven categories were listed, including the "other" response.[4]

66.3% (112) -- Bachelor's Degree
62.3% (106) -- Master's Degree
37.3% (63) -- Doctorate
33.1% (56) -- Associate Degree
24.8% (42) -- First Professional Degree
15.9% (27) -- Specialist (Fifth Year) Degree
9.5% (16) -- Other

D. Calendar System. The institutional calendar system represents the schedule followed by each institution. A quarter hour is usually computed as two-thirds of a semester hour; trimesters are equivalent to semesters. Eight of the 169 institutions designated an "other" calendar system and are eliminated from percentages. One hundred ten institutions (68.3%) listed the semester; thirty-eight (23.6%), the quarter calendar; seven (4.3%), the 4-1-4 system; and six (3.7%), the trimester.

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[4]The percentage total exceeds 100, as the data represent multiple responses.

GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

The characteristics of the gerontology instruction unit reported here include: the number of faculty involved in gerontology instruction, the primary unit designations, sources of revenue, credentials offered, and credential designations.

A. Number of Faculty. Institutional respondents were requested to indicate the number of faculty members involved in gerontology instruction at their respective schools. Table 1 displays the distribution of 396 faculty members. It is interesting to note that 77.9 percent of the responding institutions reported five or fewer faculty members teaching gerontology courses. The average number of faculty teaching gerontology per institution was 3.6.

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE)

B. Primary Unit Designation. It has been found that many gerontology education units are not autonomous academic entities within the academic affairs administrative structures of their supporting institutions. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate the primary organizational unit of the institution which administratively housed the gerontology education program or curriculum. Twenty-three missing responses left an adjusted N of 146. The two most common responses--identifying either a subunit within an academic department or a multidisciplinary program without its own faculty--each received forty-three or 29.4 percent of the responses to this item. Nineteen (13%) reported a primary unit designation as an institute or center.[5] Those indicating a

[5]Although these particular institutes and centers may or may not be primarily gerontology oriented, many well-known gerontology programs throughout the country utilize these designations.

gerontology curriculum primarily housed in an academic department totaled twelve (8.2%). Eight respondents (5.5%) explained that their programs were part of a multidisciplinary unit with faculty assigned principally to gerontology instruction. Only four (2.7%) designated their primary unit as a school (e.g., School of Social Work).

C. Source of Revenue. Gerontology education programs rely on a variety of sources for program support; many secure funds from several sources. The following gives the sources of revenue from the questionnaires and the average percentage of funding for those mentioning each.[6]

Institution -- The institution (college or university) contributes financially to 164 of the responding programs. A range from 5 to 100 percent of total support leaves an average of 41.5 percent.

Federal Government -- This source represents several agencies, the majority of which are part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (e.g., the Administration on Aging, the National Institute on Aging, and the National Institute of Child and Human Development). Fifty-eight institutions responding to this alternative received some federal funding. Federal sources supply between 1 and 100 percent of program support, with an average of 34.3 percent.

State Government -- This category (comprised of grants, contracts, etc. from state and local governmental agencies) funds student training. Thirty-five institutions relied on state monies

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[6]Since respondents were allowed to designate more than one type of program support, the total of responses for all categories exceeds the number of institutions surveyed.

for between 1 and 100 percent of their total program support with an average of 25.9 percent.

Private Sources -- These sources (foundations, private donors, etc.) support student training through grants, gifts. and contracts. The twenty-one institutions naming this form of support received from 2 to 60 percent of their total revenue from private sources for a average of 17.5 percent.

D. Credential(s) Offered. Respondents were allowed to identify up to three credentials which they offered to students pursuing aging related studies. Of the 169 responding institutions, ninety-nine named one credential, twenty-six listed two and thirteen identified three. The vast majority of institutions considered a degree, such as the Bachelor of Science with a major in gerontology or aging studies, as a credential. Very few respondents indicated that they awarded certificates as a non-degree credential. Only five (3.4%) noted an undergraduate certificate and one mentioned a graduate certificate.

Associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees represented 65.5 percent of all credentials listed. Associate degrees were designated by twenty-four (16.2%); bachelor's degrees, by thirty-nine (26.3%); and master's degrees, by thirty-four (23%) of all respondents. Doctorates in academic fields and first professional degrees (e.g., M.D., J.D., etc.) were listed by fourteen institutions (9.5%).

E. Credential Designation(s). Since most institutions offer traditional degrees as their predominant credentials and then require related specialized aging study, respondents were asked to identify any special aging designation utilized in conjunction with credentials awarded by the institution and the gerontology unit. The

percentage and number of institutions employing each designation are as follows:

26.4% (38) -- Major
23.6% (34) -- Minor
22.5% (32) -- Concentration
16.0% (23) -- Specialization
3.6% (4) -- Emphasis or Option

In addition, respondents were asked to report whether the credential designation was noted on the student's transcript. One hundred eight (66.6%) stated that designations were noted on student transcripts and fifty-four (32.1%) indicated that they were not.

FACULTY CHARACTERISTICS

Three hundred ninety-seven faculty members from the 169 responding institutions completed questionnaires regarding their personal and professional characteristics. This brief overview of faculty will include: faculty rank, appointment status, principal department assignments, gerontology teaching load, and number of articles published on gerontological topics.

A. Faculty Rank. Of the responding faculty members, twenty-five did not specify their faculty rank and it may be assumed that many come from institutions which have adopted the "no rank" policy. Thirty-five respondents listed the "other" category, which indicates a nontraditional academic rank. The remaining 341 faculty members named the following ranks:

33.1% (113) -- Assistant Professor
28.1% (96) -- Associate Professor
27.0% (92) -- Professor
7.9% (27) -- Instructor
3.8% (13) -- Lecturer

B. Appointment Status. Faculty respondents were asked to list their current appointment status. Twenty-four did not respond, leaving an adjusted N of 373. Tenured faculty numbered 180 (48.2%),

while 140 (37.2%) were on annual appointments. Fifty-three (14.2%) were in the "other" category, which included part-time faculty, administrators without faculty appointments and special appointment research and service staff who teach at least one gerontology course.

C. Principal Department Assignment. Faculty members were asked to name their department of principal appointment. Oftentimes a faculty member will carry assignments in more than one department; however, in this instance each was asked to list only the department maintaining the majority of his full-time appointment. The responses of the 397 faculty are partially tabulated in Table 2.

(INSERT TABLE 2 HERE)

D. Gerontology Teaching Load. Two hundred seventy-nine faculty reported the average number of gerontology courses they taught per academic year. The average number of courses was 2.9; Table 3 indicates the tabulation for this item.

(INSERT TABLE 3 HERE)

E. Articles Published on Gerontological Topics. Faculty respondents were asked to quantify the articles they had published in the field of gerontology. One hundred ninety-two (48.5%) of the respondents stated that they had published journal articles in the field. The number of articles per faculty member ranged from zero (52.5%) to 50. The average number of articles for those who had published at least one article was 5.9, while that average dropped to 2.9 for the total sample of 397 respondents. More than 77 percent of those who had published at all, reported fewer than six.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In tracing the development and expansion of gerontology education during the past twenty years, from the time of the Inter-

University Training Institute survey (Kleemeier, 1957) to the University of Wisconsin-AGHE survey (Sprouse, 1976), the number of institutions involved in gerontology instruction has risen from fifty to over 600. This growth has been encouraged by leaders in the field and supported by funding agencies, especially the federal government. The present study documents recent advances in the field through detailed survey responses from 169 institutions and 397 faculty members participating in gerontology instruction.

The responses to the mailed questionnaires and information gathered during on-site interviews at seventeen institutions indicate that gerontology education has evolved into a tremendous diversity of programs ranging from individual courses in traditional academic departments to complete degree programs offered by schools, centers, and institutes of gerontology. Institutions involved in gerontology instruction enroll between fifty-six and 52,000 students. Credentials in gerontology cover the full range of traditional degrees plus certificates of specialization or concentration in gerontology, as a discrete field of study. In several cases, institutions offer professionally oriented degrees which mark the beginning of the recognition of gerontology as a professional field of study, if not practice. The numerous disciplines and professional fields represented by faculty teaching gerontology constitute a broad base, which, combined with the varied organizational arrangements for course delivery, present a vast array of alternative structures and expected student outcomes, defying adequate description.

One conclusion which can be firmly made at this stage of analysis is that very few consistent patterns have been detected in the sample of institutions responding to the project questionnaire. The task

at hand is to discover the most appropriate method of contrasting and comparing the data to answer the most pertinent questions regarding the future of the field. This will be no simple task, as a mere delimitation of the parameters of the field is practically impossible. In addition, the constant shifting of institutional priorities and the continuing evolution of organizational formats for gerontology education units prevent a comprehensive compilation of data which does not rapidly become obsolete.

Should the future direction for the field be a movement toward program standards, guidelines, and eventual accreditation, (which appears to be the current trend), there will be a growing necessity for the development of model programs for each of the institutional types, expected student outcomes, credential patterns, and so on. To achieve this, further research is required to refine the classification system applied to such heterogeneous programs.

Finally, after studying nearly half of the institutions offering two or more courses in gerontology, and meeting with numerous persons initiating programs, we are firmly convinced that there will be organized attempts to control the growth of this new field, as higher education becomes more stability oriented. Many see this as a restraint of free trade; however, after witnessing what are best described as "instant" gerontology programs, it appears that some control could be beneficial. Without it, the tremendous variance in the quality of gerontology programs could harm the professions associated with aging and allow some gerontology students to receive second-rate credentials. Funding agencies, especially the federal government, can support program excellence by placing quality above egalitarian principles (e.g., one project per state) when they

distribute grants to training/education programs.

Whatever the future may hold for gerontology in higher education, those responsible for guiding the professional growth of the field, as well as its training and education programs, may wish to reconsider their exhortations for expanding the training "manifold."

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY AMONG INSTITUTIONS

Number of Faculty	Number of Institutions	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percentage
1	146	36.7	36.7
2	73	18.3	55.0
3	42	10.6	65.3
4	29	7.3	72.6
5	21	5.3	77.9
6	17	4.3	82.2
7	13	3.3	85.5
8	9	2.3	87.8
9	8	2.0	89.8
10	5	1.3	91.1
11	5	1.3	92.4
12	5	1.3	93.7
13	5	1.3	95.0
14	5	1.3	96.3
15	4	1.0	97.3
16	3	.8	98.1
17-23	7	1.8	-

TABLE 2

PRINCIPAL DEPARTMENT ASSIGNMENTS

Department	Number of Faculty	Percent of Total
Gerontology	64	17.0
Behavioral Sciences	10	2.6
Human Development	13	3.4
Biological Sciences	5	1.3
Education Fields	40	10.6
Health Related (includes Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, etc.)	61	15.3
Home Economics Related	19	5.0
Psychology	38	10.1
Social Work	28	7.4
Social Sciences	18	4.7
Sociology	53	14.1

TABLE 3

GERONTOLOGY TEACHING LOAD PER ACADEMIC YEAR

Number of Courses	Number of Faculty	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percentage
1	80	28.7	28.7
2	82	29.0	57.7
3	39	14.0	71.7
4	28	10.0	81.7
5	13	4.6	86.1
6	14	5.0	91.1
7	7	2.5	93.6
8	8	3.2	96.8
9	8	3.2	-

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